

Now Paul continues encouraging them to carry out their previously promised aid to the needy in Judea. This would help toward meeting a real and ongoing need among fellow saints elsewhere. But in addition to that it would provide a needed pursuit to release them from their self occupation, first from self indulgence and now from guilt feelings. Judgment of sin is necessary and should be done unsparingly on self when discovered. But it is defiling to deal with sin and the quicker one completes this necessary work the better. We are to learn from it but not dwell upon it repeatedly once repented of. Chagrin is but a form of pride, self coming to the fore again. So Paul gives them a healthy way out of self occupation by urging them to prepare their gift to those in need.

There is no thought of forcing them to do this against their will. Much the contrary. It is to be of a willing mind. Tithing was mandatory in the Old Testament Law. It was more of a tax than a gift. However the first tithe recorded seems to have been a voluntary act of respect when Abram gave Melchizedek tithes after conquering the invaders from the east and rescuing Lot. No mention of a tithe or other percentage is made in the New Testament regarding our giving. It is indeed to be as God has prospered us, which implies a percentage is more appropriate than a fixed amount, especially if our income varies significantly through the year. We are discouraged from holding back in lean times and waiting till we have more available to give. That time may never come. No, we are to voluntarily and habitually give regularly to the Lord, off the top. Paul gave that instruction in the first letter to the Corinthians.

*1Corinthians 16:2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.*

Therefore he specifically mentions they may give according to what they have. In fact he specifically remarks now that they are not expected to give from what they do not have. This does away with the modern idea of a faith promise to give a specific amount. We are give a percentage of what have weekly. We pray regarding our role in spotting and meeting other's needs, whether personal or for the Lord's work. And we need to be before the Lord as to our spending habits, and about what percentage He would have us personally give regularly. No one else is to know, except that couples may agree to give together as one. Scripture does not authorize assemblies or anyone else to set quotas or percentages, much less amounts to be given, nor to record amounts

given by individuals. Note that Paul is NOT SOLICITING FUNDS FOR HIS OWN WORK OR NEEDS. To do so is never suggested in scripture. Nor is this a CAMPAIGN to raise funds for the needy. Paul is simply nurturing a giving spirit in us. He refuses campaigns.

*1Corinthians 16:2 "that there be no gatherings when I come."*

The willing mind is of great value to God. There was a lovely instance of that in the collection for the tabernacle in the wilderness at mount Sinai. The people gave so willingly and so much Moses had to tell them to cease, Exodus 25:2; 36:5-7.

Paul is also constrained to take up the issue of fairness. They need not worry that they would be burdened while recipients enjoyed a life of ease at their expense. This sounds so petty, but Paul in grace covers any fears they might have had along those lines. The gifts are to the Lord. Recipients are responsible to the Lord to use them properly. They are to give as the Lord has prospered weekly, too. If the Corinthians would someday become needy he assures them God would move others to help them. It's equality with God as the referee. He is just, He is fair, He is loving. Aren't we more likely to rob God than He "rob" us?.

*Malachi 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

He reminds them of the manna God provided free to all that would but stoop to gather it. There was enough for whatever they thought they needed. And if they took more than they needed and tried to save it, it spoiled.

Titus was apparently delivering this letter to them. He had gladly volunteered to encourage them to fulfill their earlier promise. His own confidence in them and love for them is clear. And he had taken with him other brothers, unnamed, to carry the gift to Jerusalem. The Corinthians had gotten to know and trust Titus on his earlier visit and would trust him with the gift. Paul assures them of the integrity and faithfulness of the others accompanying Titus. Not only does he personally vouch for them but he cites their good reputation among other assemblies. Note how he incidently confirms the unity and mutual respect existing among all the assemblies. They are

not viewed as independent or autonomous but united and interdependent.

Notice the great care Paul always takes when money and goods belonging to others is involved. He wants to assure and maintain the highest integrity of all involved. Clearly, in dealing with the Corinthians, he also does this so there would be absolutely no opening for suspicion or false claims against him by those there who still despised him. Neither Paul or Titus sought any aid for themselves from the Corinthians or any other assemblies they visited. Paul make a point of this in chapter 12, discrediting those who were seeking to find occasion against him. But he is always careful with money and possessions of others. But aren't we to regard earthly wealth and "things" as of little account when viewed in the light of heavenly and spiritual blessings? After all didn't the early believers have all things in common? Why all the carefulness against theft, loss or misuse? Can't God take care of His things anyway? Paul assures us that our good stewardship of what the Lord has put in our hands is an essential part of faithfulness to Him. John tells us we are not to love the world neither the things in the world. But this refers to our lust for these things, thus displacing God in our hearts. But earthly articles of clothing, food and utensils provided us for our needs and enjoyment are put into our care. We are thankful for them, and we are not to be careless and wasteful with them. They really belong to the Lord. We are to be good stewards of His things. If we spend our earnings with which He has prospered

us on anything, then it is to be used for His glory and cared for as His.

The visitors accompanying Titus are probably brethren from assemblies in Macedonia who were taking gifts from their assemblies to Judea. The example of these assemblies was mentioned as encouragement for the Corinthians, as already mentioned. These trustworthy brothers were entrusted with a mission by the assemblies where they lived. How neat to be able to entrust one another with the work of the Lord even in seemingly mundane things as conveying a gift or message to others. There was no FedEx, UPS or Postal services in those days and travel was at best arduous and at worst treacherous. Bandits and thieves abounded on the road (remember the man the good Samaritan helped was attacked by thieves. Paul mentions these dangers in chapter 11 where he gives a catalog of dangers he experienced.

*11:26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

Making a delivery across these distances in those days was not for weaklings, timid or cowards. How wonderful there were those willing to put themselves at risk and through hardship and inconvenience for the sake of others.

By Ron Canner, July 21, 2004